

Oglesey, Richard J.

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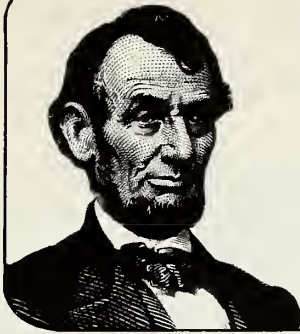


Abraham Lincoln and Wartime Governors

Richard Oglesby

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection



Lincoln Lore

February, 1980

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Number 1704

THE LAST BOOK LINCOLN READ

J.G. Randall said of Lincoln that the "continual interweaving of good fun in his writings and speeches shows that humor was no mere technique, but a habit of his mind." His fondness for humorous writers was lifelong. All students of Lincoln's tastes in reading note his affection for such humorists as Orpheus C. Kerr (a pun on "office seeker" and the pseudonym of Robert H. Newell). Petroleum V. Nasby (the pseudonym of David Ross Locke) was another favorite. The day Lincoln first presented the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet, he began the meeting by reading "High Handed Outrage in Utica," a humorous piece by Artemus Ward (the pseudonym of Charles Farrar Browne). Lincoln's penchant for reading aloud from comical books apparently persisted to his dying day, when he regaled old friends with anecdotes from *Phoenixiana*; or, *Sketches and Burlesques*.

John Phoenix was the pseudonym of George Horatio Derby. Born in Dedham, Massachusetts, in 1823, Derby graduated from West Point in 1846. He served with distinction in the Mexican War and later led several exploring expeditions in the West, mostly in California. A wit and a notorious practical joker, he first gained literary distinction in California in 1853, when he was put in temporary charge of the *San Diego Herald*, a Democratic newspaper. Derby was a Whig in politics, one of a great tradition of Whig humorists, and he quickly turned the newspaper on its head politically. California howled with laughter. In 1856 he published *Phoenixiana*, a collection of humorous sketches which became immediately popular.

Naturally, Lincoln was attracted to the Whig humorist. In his debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Freeport on August 27, 1858, Lincoln charged his opponent with inconsistency on the question of the power of states to exclude slavery from their limits. Douglas, Lincoln insisted, had once charged that the Democratic administration of James Buchanan was conspiring "to rob the States of their power to exclude slavery from their limits." Douglas withdrew the charge when Robert Toombs of Georgia stated that only one man in the Union favored such a move.

It reminds me of the story [Lincoln continued] that John Phoenix, the California railroad surveyor, tells. He says they started out from the Plaza to the Mission of Dolores. They had two ways of determining distances. One was by a chain and pins taken over the ground. The other was by a "go-it-ometer" — an invention of his own — a three-legged instrument, with which he computed a series of triangles between the points. At night he turned to the chain-man to ascertain what distance they had come, and found that by some mistake he had merely dragged the chain over the ground without keeping any record. By the "go-it-ometer" he found he had made ten miles. Being skeptical about this, he asked a drayman who was passing how far it was to the plaza. The drayman replied it was just half a mile, and the surveyor put it down in his book — just as Judge Douglas says, after he had made his calculations and computations, he took Toombs' statement.

The reporters covering the speech noted that "Great laughter" followed.

The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum recently acquired a copy of *Phoenixiana*, notable because it belonged to David Davis, Lincoln's friend and Judge for the Eighth Judicial Circuit. Davis wrote his name and the date, "March 28th . . . 1856," in pencil on the back of the frontispiece. The Sangamon County Circuit Court was then in session in Springfield, and Lincoln argued before the Court that day. One cannot help speculating that Judge Davis very likely showed the book to his friend.

If Lincoln owned a copy of *Phoenixiana* himself, its present location is unknown. It seems likely that he did, however. The description of Lincoln's last day by Katherine Helm, Mary Todd Lincoln's niece, mentions the book. After their carriage ride in the late afternoon, President and Mrs. Lincoln separated. The President entered the White House with Richard J. Oglesby, the Governor of Illinois, and some other political friends. According to Miss Helm, Governor Oglesby later recalled:

Lincoln got to reading



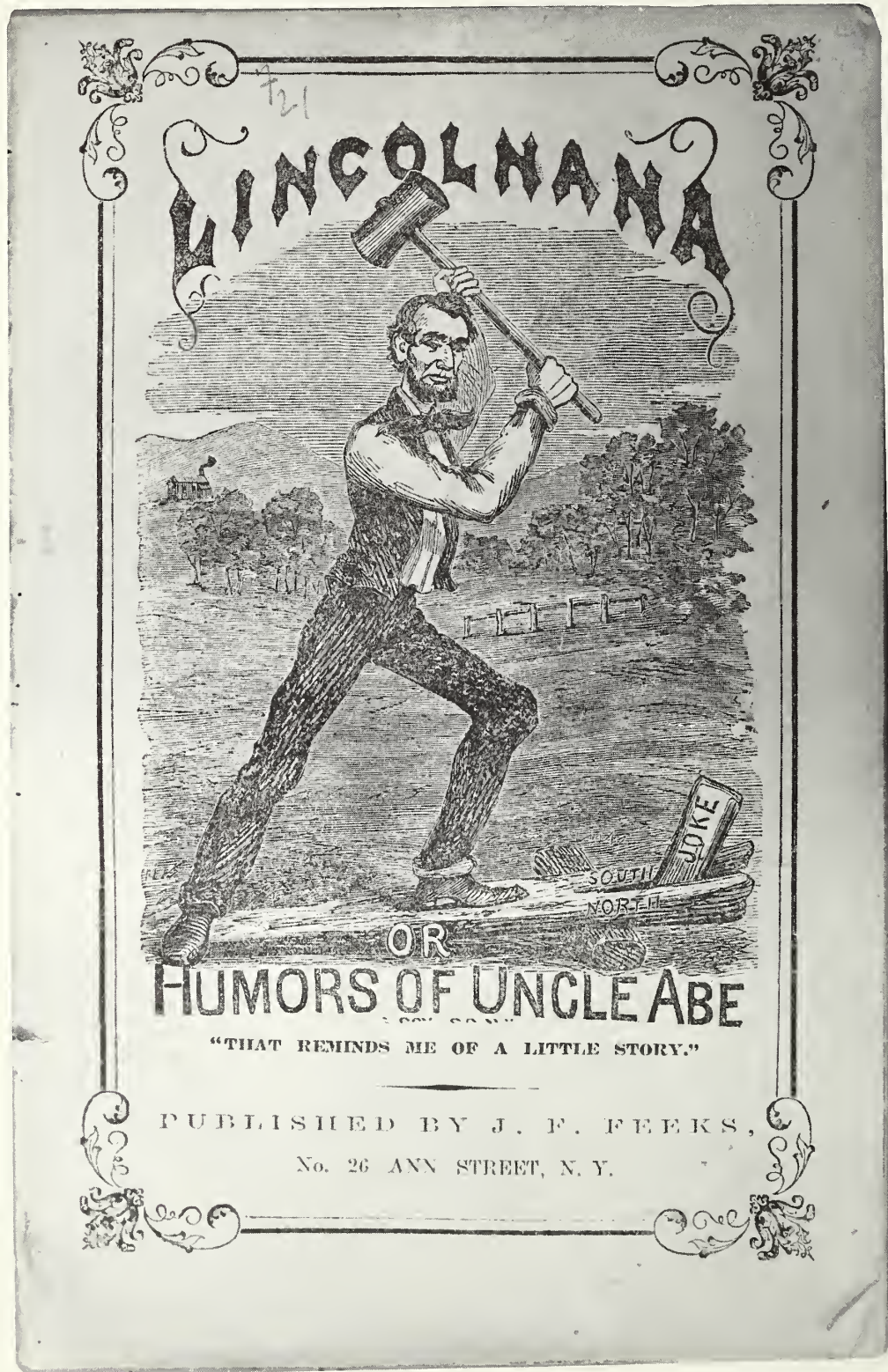
Yours respectfully
John P. Squibob

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. The frontispiece of *Phoenixiana*, shown above, has this note printed under it: "This autograph may be relied on as authentic, as it was written by one of Mr. Squibob's most intimate friends."

some humorous book — I think it was by "John Phoenix." They kept sending for him to come to dinner. He promised each time to go, but would continue reading the book. Finally he got a sort of peremptory order that he must come

to dinner at once. It was explained to me by the old man at the door that they were going to have dinner and then go to the theater.



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. *Lincolnana* was one of several cheap paperbacks published during the Civil War which capitalized on the President's reputation for enjoying humor. Though this trait endears Lincoln to us today, it was not universally admired in his own day. Note that the cover of this book shows him splitting the Union with a joke. Lincoln was often pictured as a vulgar jokester, too small for the great office he occupied.

The Governor Oglesby Mansion, Inc.



Prepared and provided by members of Zonta Club of Decatur.
1876 Projected View
with circular drive to main entrance

Richard James Oglesby

Richard J. Oglesby's record of public service undoubtedly justifies his long being called "Decatur's most distinguished citizen". In addition, his personal qualities qualify him as Decatur's most popular citizen of the nineteenth century. Although he spent his first twelve years in Kentucky, his last ten years in Logan County and was away from Decatur in public service many times, it was the forty-six Decatur years, 1836-1882, that were his rich and productive ones.

Politically, he was our district's state senator, Illinois' thrice-elected governor, and the only Decatur resident to serve in the U. S. Senate. Here he first met Lincoln with whom his career would be interrelated. In 1860 Oglesby promoted Lincoln's candidacy for the presidency at a state Republican convention held in Decatur. With skillful timing and great showmanship he initiated and secured adoption of the slogan "Lincoln the railsplitter for president" achieving enthusiastic state endorsement of Lincoln. Later he was an important factor in Lincoln's nomination at the national Republican convention in Chicago. He was at Lincoln's bedside when he died, was president of the group to plan the monument in Springfield at Oak Ridge cemetery, giving the oration at its dedication with President U. S. Grant and his cabinet in the audience.



Militarily, he fought in the Mexican and Civil wars, achieving the rank of major-general in the latter. Injured at the Battle of Corinth, he carried an ounce shot in his body for the remainder of his life while continuing as an active and productive public servant.

Personally, he has been described as a big man, with a big heart and a big brain. An experience observing the sale of a family slave may have influenced his being antislave from an early age and resulted in his exerting strong influence during his first term as governor in Illinois' becoming the first state in the union to ratify the 13th amendment prohibiting slavery.

Oglesby's first defeat (1858) as a political candidate was said to be a personal triumph, for his convincing earnestness, hearty good nature and superior eloquence impressed his most vigorous opponents. As a stump speaker he was said to have no equal. He was electric, moving, full of a penetrating enthusiasm. There was no sham. "His clean-shaven, expressive face and his bluff, hearty western manner gave his appearance a charm that was brightened by a physique of commanding proportions."

When President Lincoln in 1864 asked that Illinois Republicans nominate a strong candidate for governor because of the help and support he needed, Oglesby was his suggestion. Oglesby was delighted, was nominated, and immediately "made things lively." His agreement with Lincoln on major issues of the day contributed to his strong feeling of loyalty. With Lincoln under fire for his war policies, Oglesby never apologized for him. Instead he predicted that the time would come when Lincoln's almost God-like wisdom, foresight and forbearance would place him on the calendar of saints."

The Governor Oglesby Mansion

Richard J. Oglesby's first home in Decatur was a log cabin where he lived with his Aunt Judy and Uncle Richard Oglesby on arriving as an orphan, age twelve, in 1836.

When Richard Oglesby married Anna White of Decatur in 1859, her father was said to have given them a home at the southwest corner of West William and Edward. Records show that September 28, 1859, Richard Oglesby purchased at auction for \$2600, lots one through five, Western Addition, from the estate of John Whitney. It is thought that a house built by Whitney in 1857 was part of the purchase. It is presumed that this was the seven-room, two-story frame house later attached to the west end of the larger, presently existing house. This older house became an ell on the newer one, housing kitchen and servants' quarters until it was removed some years later.

The present house was probably built about 1874, after Oglesby's marriage to Emma Gillett Keays in 1873, while he was our United States senator (1873-1879). He has been quoted as saying that the new house was to be his place of retirement following his term in the senate. Sources relate that his four children by his second wife were born "in his handsome new house."

And it is a handsome house, possessing such features of the Italianate style as the low-pitched roof with belvedere or flat deck area at the roof's center, originally with a balustrade around it; overhanging eaves with decorative brackets as supports; grouping of windows; bay windows; and of course, verandas. The unusual, diamond-shaped window lead panes are the original ones. Only the solarium attached to the rear of the house is not original, it having been added about 1952.

On the interior, a vestibule with tile floor leads to a wide, central hall with three-inch alternating strips of walnut and maple flooring. This same type of flooring is in the dining room located on the front west side. In the central hall is one of the mansion's seven fireplaces, and across from it on the east wall is a slightly curving stairway of walnut with a niche in the wall for statuary.

The dining room completely refurbished in tones of red; with wall paper portraying in effect, the original pattern. There is a semi-octagonal bay window, and an elaborate chandelier with globes of frosted glass originally lighted by gas.

On the left (east) front of the first floor is a spacious 16 by 30 foot living room with 12-foot ceiling and rectangular bay window.

Behind the parlor at the rear of the mansion is the especially beautiful library with walnut wainscoting, bookcases, mantel, and walnut-framed mirror over it. There is a parquet floor and an intricate ceiling design of walnut and plaster with the ceiling of the semi-octagonal bay window repeating in miniature the ceiling in the main portion of the room. The long, narrow diamond-paned double casement doors on the east originally opened on the veranda. That is where General (former president) U. S. Grant stood on October 6, 1880 to receive the cheers and shouts of the Civil War Union veterans in Decatur for a G.A.R. encampment, with Grant and son Jesse as the Oglesby's house guests.

Oglesby's plan to retire at the close of his senate term changed when he was urged to run for a third time as governor, twenty years after serving his first term. He won, and at the end of his 1885-1889 term, he retired, not to 421 West William, but to Oglehurst, an estate near Elkhart; he had sold the Decatur property March 30, 1882, to James E. Bering, grandfather of E. B. Evans, whose family in March, 1976 sold the property to the Macon County Conservation District which has an agreement with the Governor Oglesby Mansion Corporation, Linley W. Hurtt, president, to operate and restore it as a memorial to Governor Richard J. Oglesby.

Richard James Oglesby

— a chronological listing of some of the important events in his life —

- 1824- Born July 25 in Oldham County, Kentucky, son of Colonel Jacob Oglesby.
- 1833- Orphaned at age eight in June, when his parents died of cholera.
- 1833- Saw Uncle Tim, a family slave, sold for \$400 with Dick, aged 9, in tears, promising that some day he'd buy Uncle Tim's freedom. Oglesby later referred to this experience as the beginning of his strong anti-slave feelings.
- 1834-35 Worked in Kentucky for a year at the carpenter's trade.
- 1836- Brought to Decatur by his uncle, Willis Oglesby, and placed in the care of another uncle, Richard Oglesby, and his wife, "Aunt Judy". Continued his carpentry apprenticeship for six months under a prominent Decatur builder, E. O. Smith. Also worked at farming.
- 1842- Raised hemp one summer, manufacturing the rope that launched Decatur's first flatboat on the Sangamon River. Net earnings for the summer, \$6.50.
- 1844- Studied law in Springfield under the highly respected Judge Silas Robbins.
- 1845- Admitted to the bar, practicing law briefly in Sullivan, Illinois.
- 1846- In war with Mexico, retiring as a first lieutenant after fighting at Vera Cruz and Cerro Gordo.
- 1849- Joined a party of eight Decatur men, including Henry Prather, who was his brother-in-law, E. O. Smith and Samuel Powers in the gold rush. Drove a six-mule team from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in ninety-five days.
- 1851- Returned from the trip with \$4500 in gold, purchased Uncle Tim's freedom, and invested some of his gold, plus money from the land warrant received as a soldier in the Mexican War in what would become the Oglesby addition, naming one street Eldorado for the gold mine and another Cerro Gordo for the battle of that name.
- 1853- Formed a law partnership with Sheridan Wait.
- 1856- Began a twenty-month tour of Europe, Egypt, Arabia and the Holy Land. Saw this trip as a way of securing education in a manner more to his liking than reading or schooling.
- 1857- Gave a series of talks on his travels in Powers Hall, these credited with helping him develop "the wonderful magnetic power of his eloquence". (Jane Johns)
- 1859- Bought lots 1 through 5, block 5, Western Addition, with an 1857 house on it built by John Whitney. Was said to have been a wedding gift from the father of his bride, Anna White of Decatur.
- 1860- On May 8th, Oglesby presented the slogan "Lincoln the railsplitter for President", to the Illinois Republican Convention meeting in Decatur's temporary wigwam. Under Oglesby's skillful guidance, Lincoln received the Illinois convention's overwhelming endorsement of Lincoln for the presidency. The following week in Chicago, Oglesby assisted in the same, at the National Republican Convention.
- 1860- Elected to the state senate.
- 1861- Resigned as state senator to begin service in the Civil War. Chosen colonel of the Eighth Illinois Regiment, the first regiment to be tendered in Illinois.
- 1862- Promoted to Brigadier-General on April 1, 1862 in recognition of valor at the Battle of Fort Donelson. Shot through the lung at the Battle of Corinth. Commissioned Major General (November, 1865).
- 1863- Assigned to the Sixteenth Army Corps, still suffering from the bullet he carried and would carry for the rest of his life. Tried to resign but General Grant detailed him to court martial duty in Washington, D.C.
- 1864- Returned to Decatur in May to recuperate and later to become a candidate for governor. Elected to a term 1865-68.
- 1865- On January 17th, sworn in quietly as governor of Illinois, the inauguration delayed by the death of his five-year old son, Dickie.
- 1865- Jan. 31 — Led the Illinois legislature in this state's becoming the first in the nation to ratify the 13th amendment to the U. S. constitution, abolishing slavery.
- 1865- April 15 — At Lincoln's deathbed.
- 1865- May 11 — Made president of an association to secure funds and erect a suitable monument to Lincoln in Springfield's Oak Ridge Cemetery.
- 1868- Mrs. Anna White Oglesby died in the governor's mansion. Buried in Greenwood Cemetery, Decatur, near son Dickie. (May 16)
- 1872- Elected to second term as governor. Resigned eight days later when elected U. S. senator by the state legislature. Senate term — 1872-1879.
- 1873- November 18 — Married Emma Gillett Keays in Elkhart, Illinois.
- 1874- October 15 — Lincoln's monument in Springfield dedicated, Oglesby giving the oration with President U. S. Grant and cabinet in the audience.
- 1880- October 6, 7 — Entertained General Grant at 421 West William while Grant was in Decatur as honored guest and speaker at a national G.A.R. encampment. (The Grand Army of the Republic had been founded in Decatur April 6, 1866, an organization of Union soldiers in the Civil War).
- 1882- March 30 — 421 West William sold by Oglesby to James E. Bering, a founder of the Chambers, Bering and Quinlan Company.
- 1885- Inaugurated to a 3rd term as governor, twenty years after his first term.
- 1889- Retired from political life, living at his Oglchurst estate near Elkhart, Illinois, until his death in 1899.

RICHARD JAMES OGLESBY

President Lincoln Counterpart

Both born in Kentucky; both successful and astute Politicians; both served in the Civil War. Lincoln as President of the United States and Oglesby as a Commissioned Officer in the United States Army.

Decatur's most illustrious and distinguished citizen of the nineteenth century, who left a record of public service never equalled by any other citizen of Decatur.

The only person from Decatur to be elected thrice to Illinois Governorships and one term to the United States Senate.

Governing Bodies of the Oglesby Mansion Titleholder

The Macon County Conservation District
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Wesley Hicks

Its Restoration Body

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THE GOVERNOR OGLESBY MANSION, CORP.

General Information

The Governor Oglesby Mansion, Corp., is a non-profit organization, chartered by the State of Illinois; created for the purpose of the acquisition, preservation, restoration and refurbishing the homestead of the late Richard J. Oglesby, to commemorate his memory as a thrice-elected Governor to the State of Illinois from Decatur.

The restored and refurbished Governors Mansion of Decatur's most illustrious citizen for posterity; will provide for community assemblages, educational facilities, a tourism site for visitors to our area.

Memberships Available

All memberships in the Governor Oglesby Mansion Corp. are fully deductible from Income tax at the end of each year.

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